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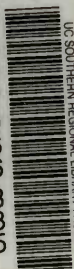
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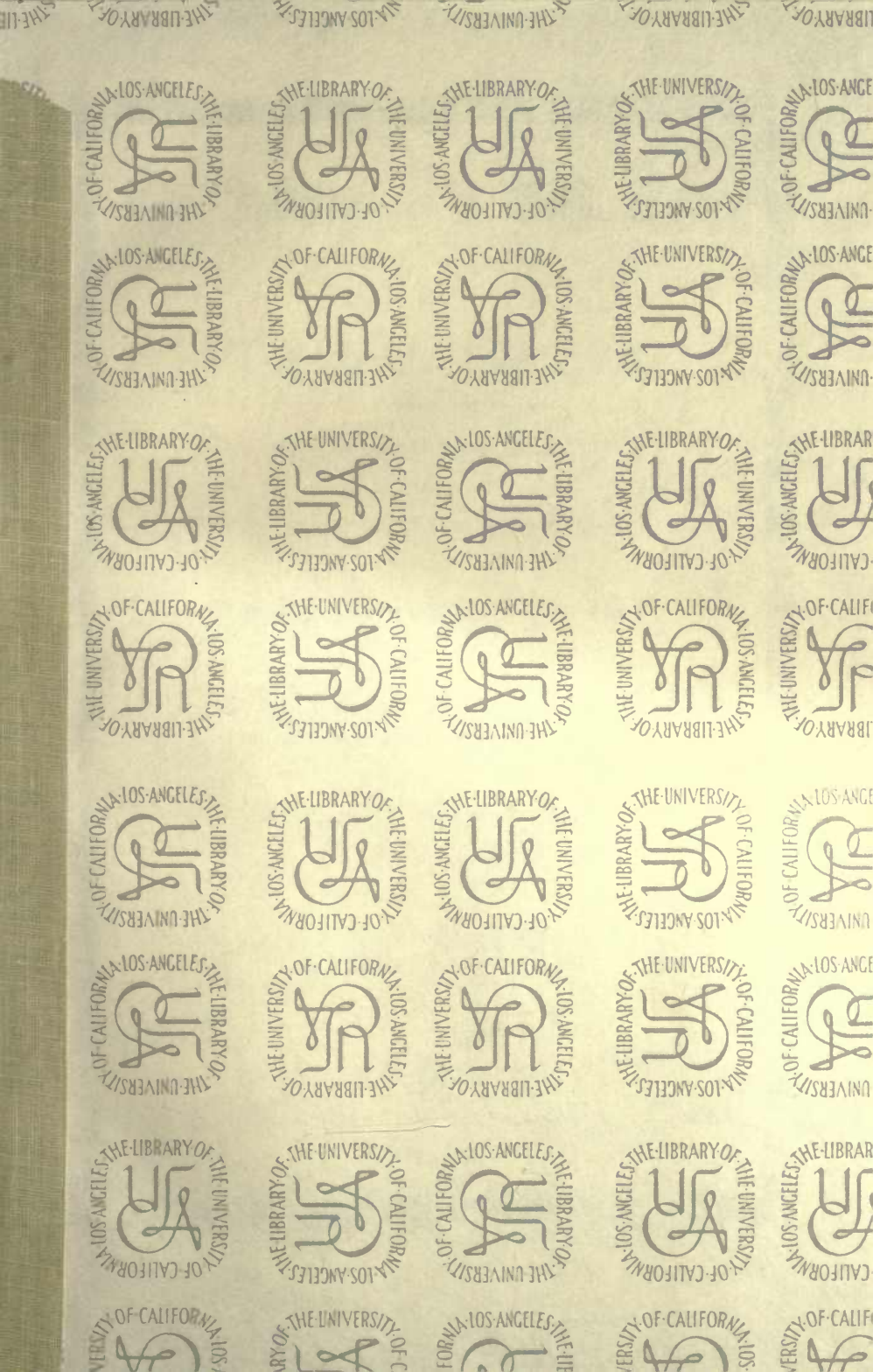
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The Influence of a Good Name.

A

FUNERAL SERMON,

DELIVERED AT

THE MEDRASH OF עץ חיים

ON

SUNDAY, 11th KISLEV, 21st NOVEMBER, 5624,

DURING

A Special Service held in Memory of

THE LATE

REV. BARNETT ABRAHAMS, B.A.

DAYAN OF THE SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE JEWS' CONGREGATION.

BY

THE REV. A. P. MENDES.

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FUNERAL SERMON.

WE are met to pay a tribute of respect to departed worth. The Eternal, in His wisdom, has summoned from our midst a revered teacher, and so suddenly has His will been done, that we are hardly yet awakened to a sense of the loss which the community has sustained. We hear the plaint of the widow, bewailing her husband gone from her; we hear the infant voices of children asking for their father; we hear the regretful accents of disciples lamenting their instructor called away, and through all ranks of our people there are men exclaiming to their neighbours—

הלא תרעו כי שר גדול נפל היום הזה בישראל :

“Know ye not that a chief and a great man is prostrate this day in Israel?”

All are full of sorrow, rich man and poor, high and lowly; and though the first period of ritual mourning has reached its close **לבוש** **העם** **כל** **יוסיפו** **אורו** “all the people continue to weep for him.” But it is our province to restrain that grief—to still the voice of mourning by drawing instruction from

the judgment of the Lord, and by displaying those lessons which none loved more to teach than the departed **והחי יתן אל לבו** “so that the living may take it to heart,” and be comforted and improved.

טוב שם משמן טוב ויום המות מיום הולדו :

“A good name is better than good oil, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth.”—(Eccl. vii. 1.)

In these words, brethren, the Preacher propounds one of those doctrines so peculiar to him, doctrines which startle by their apparent incongruity, but which when subjected to mature reflection, present the very concentration of truth. He is anxious to celebrate the praises of a good name, and to establish its pre-eminence above every thing besides; but he compares it not with rich gems, or costly treasures, or vast possessions, he simply compares it with good oil, and declaring that it is superior thereunto, he proceeds to the not less startling assertion, which closes the text **ויום המות מיום הולדו** “that the day of death is better than the day of one’s birth.” Let us devote to both these assertions, that deep reflection which is demanded by their importance, and seek to discover :

- 1.—*In what consists the excellence of a good name above good oil.*
- 2.—*What is the advantage of the day of death above the day of one’s birth.*

I.

A good name is a possession dear to the heart of every man who fears God and respects society. It is the prize for which the greatest of our kind contend, the rich reward which impels the labour and challenges the hopes and aspirations of all grades and conditions of mankind. Ask the statesman wherefore he sacrifices the ease and comfort of his station to spend his energies in the senate of his people, and waste his vital powers in the cares and anxieties of public life. If his answer be the truth he will say it is for the good name with which posterity will reward him. See the soldier who woos the field of danger, and risks both life and limb in foreign climes to fight the foe. Regard him as he mounts the ramparts of the enemy over the bodies of his fallen comrades, heedless of the shafts that fly around him—winged messengers of death. Ask him what is the source of his heroism, and he will tell you the love of fame, another word for the good name which will reward his deeds of daring. And rightly, brethren, is a good name the prize among mankind. It is our credential in the sight of God and man. It proclaims in unmistakable accents that we have done our duty as God appointed us to do it. It is a foretaste on earth of the reward that awaits us here-

after. Possessed, then, of such excellence, how is it that the sage compares it to what is apparently so ignoble and valueless, good oil? Because good oil to ancients was the best artificial means of illumination, and it therefore formed a faithful type of all that is instructing, all that is ennobling, all that is improving, in a word it symbolised light—the light of wisdom, the light of virtue, the light of religion. And yet, my brethren, the sage says, a good name is superior to it. Though wisdom, virtue, religion can abstractedly teach mankind, and the light they diffuse can cheer, encourage, comfort, and assist, still they never attain so much efficacy, they never achieve so much success as when they are presented in the life of a great and good man, and shine forth with the radiance of a good name. The living example is the best light. To it men turn with confidence, assured not only of warning and exhortation, but also of counsel, aid, and succour. The way-worn traveller is attracted by the distant light which promises shelter, rest, and comfort; but let his hope remain unfulfilled—let him meet inhospitality where he looked for aid, and he will ever after shun the light which attracted but cheered not, which invited but welcomed not. Thus though the influence of religion, virtue, and wisdom, as developed by the teachings of sage and seer, invite the wandering minds of men, unless they be received and

entertained, aided, and encouraged by the labours of a good pastor who diffuses the radiance of a good name, men will avoid as inhospitable the light shining from temple and from college which attracts only to disappoint.

Here, however, brethren, there blazed a light, now unhappily extinct for ever,—which used to cheer, more than it attracted, which warmed and comforted even beyond its promise. The teacher whom God in His wisdom has summoned hence, shone among us in every sense a light, diffusing knowledge, teaching religion, and exemplifying virtue, in his deeds, and thoughts, and feelings. As a teacher of men, he was remarkable for the earnestness and burning zeal which impressed his every word. He cultivated not the graces of oratory, nor sought to charm the ear with the music of his periods, but was terse and vigorous in his teachings, and endeavoured in homely language, to plant the truth in the very hearts of his auditory. As a teacher of youth, he was patient, kind, and gentle, and though the turbulent and unreasoning might have abused his mild authority, his pupils loved him for his forbearing goodness. But not only to the Synagogue and the school, were his labors restricted. Here, in these precincts he came to teach, a labor of love and piety. Collecting around him those who longed for the waters of the

living spring of truth, he brought them here to drink, and as the guardian placed—

לשמור את דרך עין החיים

“*To keep the way of the TREE OF LIFE**” he taught them of his wisdom, and showed them how to live. And when at length, his arduous work completed, he sought his home, it was not to share in the sweets of his household joys, not to join in the amenities of social communion, but still to teach, to teach with his fertile mind and his ready pen; to speak to the humble child of toil, to cheer and comfort, enlighten and instruct him by the tracts his industry supplied. § Thus it was, that while his good life was closing in and his soul was yet hovering on the brink of eternity, perhaps at the very moment his spirit was soaring to his God in heaven, his beautiful lesson was being read, the last lesson he was to give us—the lesson which inculcated self-control as the source of godliness by showing how it was נח מצא הן בעיני ה “that Noah found grace in the sight of the Eternal.” ||

But who can describe how he taught by the light

* The institution of Heshaim, “The Tree of Life,” under which the “Medrash” is established.

§ “The Jewish Association for the Diffusion of Religious Knowledge,” was founded by the Rev. B. Abrahams, who was also one of the greatest contributors to its valuable publications.

|| The text of the Tract published on the 14th November, which was the day the Rev. Dayan died.

of example, who shall tell how his inner life presented the holy calm, which only the pious know; how, innocent as a babe, he scarcely knew the semblance of guile and falsehood, when they came before him, but drew all men to his capacious heart and taught himself to love them. For the truthfulness of this portraiture, let the sorrow of the whole community be guarantee; let the tears which copiously flow from the eyes of all ranks and conditions record their unerring testimony, and proclaim the worth of the departed.

There are a widow, orphans, and kindred, mourning for a loss irreparable, the loss of loving husband—tender father—affectionate relative. There is a whole community mourning for a national loss; the bereavement of one who was at once a chief, an ornament, and an honour to their institutions. There are the wise and learned mourning, because they have lost a friend and an associate whom they loved and valued. There are disciples sorely grieved, because God has recalled a teacher, to whom they were attached by the bonds of affection. And there are the poor and needy mourning, because they have lost an advocate in the day of adversity, a help in the dark hour of sorrow, to whom they looked for comfort, and counsel, and succour. All this universal grief, my brethren, is only an emphatic confirmation of the

first assertion contained in the text, that "A good name is better than good oil."

II.

But we have also to discover the advantage of the day of death over the day of one's birth. We have called the proposition startling, and so it really is. Think of the day, when in our happy homes it is proclaimed יֵלֵד יוֹלֵד לָנוּ "that a child is born unto us;" think of the gladness of heart and the thankfulness of spirit, of the loud merriment and the joyous festivity, with which we welcome a new claimant to our affection, and contrast with these the solemn stillness of the house of death, the anguish of spirit and the bitter sorrow, the wail of woe and the groan of misery, which mark the presence of the destroyer. Then ask how can the day of death be deemed better than the day of our birth. The reply will be simple: that in the moral world individual feelings are absorbed in the general advantage. Judged by this standard, when a child is ushered into the world, what benefit accrues to society? what lesson can that birth originate? how can it improve and instruct? The child must become a man, ere society can draw advantage from his life. But when that man has reached the day of death, when his deeds are before us to warn or to

direct, to admonish, or to cheer, by the influence of his example, for good or evil, it is then that he becomes a teacher in the great school of the world. It was in this spirit that the sages taught גדולים צדיקים במיתתן יותר מבהייהו "the righteous are greater at their death than in their lives." Those sages knew that the spectacle of a pious man going to his rest of peace, is one that will not fade quickly from the recollection. They knew that after death every foible in the character of a good man disappears from view, eclipsed by his transcendent merits. And they knew too, that all who loved and valued him in life, would continue to cherish his memory by perpetuating the lessons he taught, by accomplishing the work he wrought. Thus, brethren, though the example of the departed chief and master, for whom we are mourning, is no longer before us; though we cannot now see wisdom, virtue, and religion as developed in his daily life כי לקח אותו אלהים "because God has taken him," yet let us ask shall his influence terminate with death? Not so, my friends. Though gone from us he is not lost to us. His body has returned to dust, but his spirit lives, and lives among us, too, in his past teachings and in his past labours. צדיקים במיתתן קרויין חיים "The righteous even in death are regarded as living." So *can* he live, so *will* he live in our memory, continuing to instruct and edify, to improve and enlighten. But for this you must

keep his example before you always. Like him practise a pure, simple, and unostentatious piety, and make your rule of life the golden admonition עֲשׂוּת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהִלַּכְתָּ לִנְת עִם אֱלֹהֶיךָ “to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Brethren, you all know what he was to the poor, and what he did for them, how his benevolent heart was touched with sympathy at every tale of distress, and how his ready hand was open to share his last shilling with the needy. When, then, you thus remember his charity—a charity that hid itself from the gaze of men—try to imitate and delight to do as he did—not only to give, but also to comfort—not only to assist but to deliver, cheer, and support likewise. And while you thus remember him as he shone with the light of religion and the light of virtue, do not forget him in connexion with the light of knowledge. Brethren, we have already seen that he loved education. He laboured for it, we may almost say he died for it, since it was in that great and holy work his vital powers were expended. Thus he felt a holy pride in rearing to the study of the law the most promising of these תִּינוּקוֹת שֶׁל בֵּית רַבֵּן “the sucklings nurtured in the school of the sages.” Brethren, do not suffer that good and pious work to fail. Let the seed which he planted and which, sprung up into healthy life, has surrounded this court with vigorous saplings, be tended and

nurtured. In other words, let not these children upon whom he spent such care be neglected,—forsaken; but let their education become an institution that shall at once ennoble your community, exalt the character of your poor, and furnish a glorious monument to the memory of him who commenced the work in piety, and while he lived, conducted it with zeal, and truth; and faithfulness.

And you too, my children, have lost a very dear friend and benefactor. You, too, owe something to the memory of the good man who has gone from us. He has left you a legacy in his example. Your duty is to receive it, to cherish it, to value it while you live. It is a glorious example for you to imitate, for you to emulate. Our revered teacher was once a child like you, craving for knowledge that seemed beyond his reach. He came here to the עץ חיים fed on the tree of life, and grew and rose to eminence above us. He accomplished this first by his industry, his love of learning, and his devotion to study; secondly, by his virtuous and religious conduct, his fear of God and love of man. You cannot all rise to the same eminence, but you can all acquire the learning he possessed, you can all become as good and as religious as he was. Try to do all this and you will succeed, provided you are faithful to what he taught you by his precept, and what he shewed you by his example. So shall you deserve the rich

blessings of your God, and win the approbation of your fellow men ; and by the moral influence you will attain and exercise in your sphere you will learn the truth which the wisest of men once taught, and which the whole experience of the world confirms טוב שם משמן טוב “ that a *good* name is better than good oil.”

Eternal God ממית ומחיה “ who causest death and reanimatest,” מוריד שאל ויעל “ who bringest down to the grave and raisest up,” we humbly pray thee to remember in love and mercy the spirit of thy servant whom thou hast summoned to thy presence. Forgive, Lord, the transgressions of his life, and regard not errors that belong to frail humanity, but receive his soul with grace and favour for the zeal with which he laboured in thy cause, for the piety with which he strove to serve thee. Let his good works be arrayed before thee as a pure sacrifice, and let their sweet savour win for him the treasure of thy tender mercy, so that thy angels may welcome him to thy courts of bliss, there to enjoy שבע שמחות את נעימות “ abundance of joys in thy presence ” פניך במינך נצח “ everlasting pleasures at thy right hand.”

Upon the mourners, Lord, we also invoke Thy compassion. Be with them in this bereavement, which Thy hand hath inflicted, to pour into their hearts Thy comforting Spirit, that they may bow with meek and pious resignation to Thine all-wise

decree. Let them find sweet consolation in Thy sacred word, and lead them to the path of religion, where humility bends the knee before thy will, and amid all suffering proclaims צדיק אתה “that Thou art just.”

And upon all of us, Father, upon all Thy house of Israel, send a spirit of wisdom and understanding, so that we, like the departed, may here cultivate the duties which are pleasing in Thy sight, and become inheritors of the blessing, the peace, and the felicity אשר צפנת ליראיך “which Thou hast reserved for them that fear Thee.” Amen.

THE LANGUAGE OF A GOOD WIFE

And now, let them find their consolation in Thy
sacred word, and lead them to the path of religion,
where humbly bends the knee before Thy will, and
with all willing proclama- tion cry "that Thou
art just."

And again all of us, Father, upon all Thy house of
Israel, send a spirit of wisdom and understanding, so
that we, like the departed, may be so edified the
duties which are pleasing in Thy sight, and become
inheritors of the blessing, the peace, and the felicity
Thou dost give "which Thou hast reserved for
them that love Thee." Amen.



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